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(54) **DIRECT DATA COMMUNICATION IN INFRASTRUCTURE MODE IN WIRELESS COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS**

370/352

See application file for complete search history.

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H04W 84/12 (2009.01)

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CPC **H04W 76/023** (2013.01); **H04W 36/0022** (2013.01); **H04W 84/12** (2013.01)

(58) **Field of Classification Search**

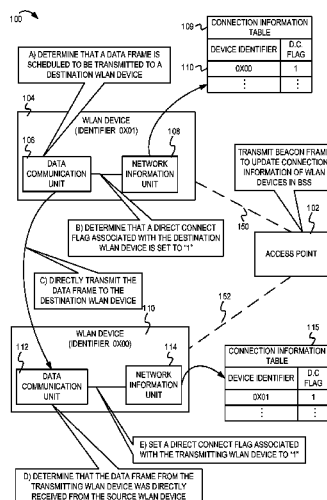
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USPC 370/338, 349, 252, 312, 337, 331, 370/395.3, 401, 329, 254, 389, 392, 354,

(57) **ABSTRACT**

In an infrastructure wireless network, a direct data communication mechanism can be implemented for wireless network devices in a common basic service set (BSS) to directly exchange data frames, without transmitting the data frames via an access point. Each of the wireless network devices in the BSS can receive connection information that indicates whether data frames can be directly transmitted to each of the wireless network devices in the BSS. A source wireless network device can determine whether the data frames can be directly transmitted to a destination wireless network device based on analyzing the connection information. If the data frames can be directly transmitted, the source wireless network device can directly transmit the data frames to the destination WLAN device without having to transmit the data frames to the access point, which may improve transmission efficiency.

19 Claims, 5 Drawing Sheets



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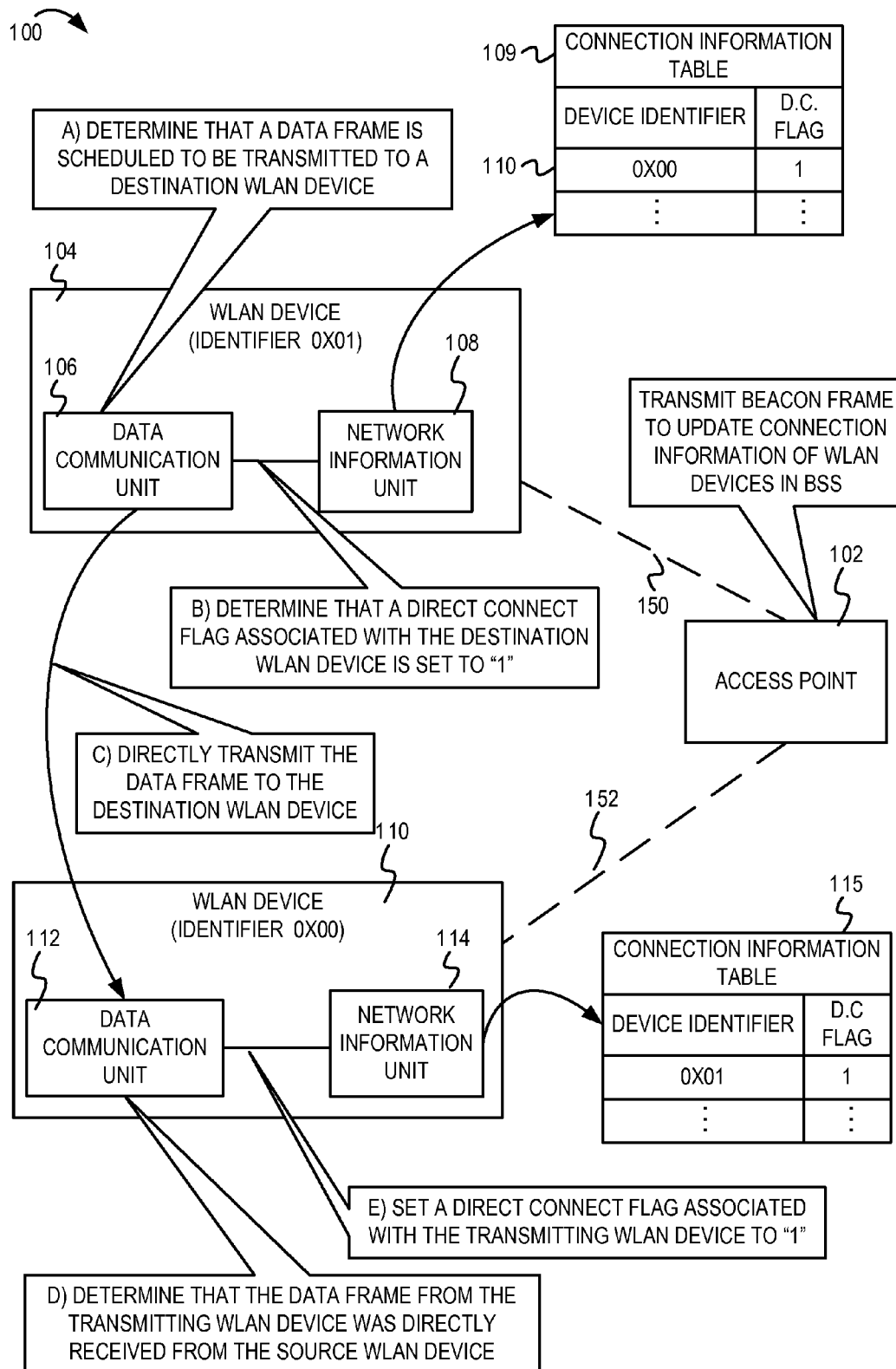


FIG. 1

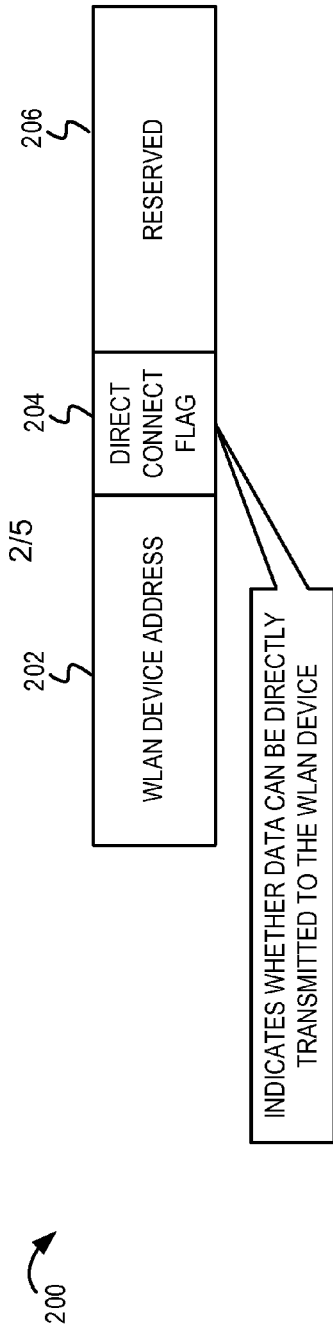


FIG. 2A

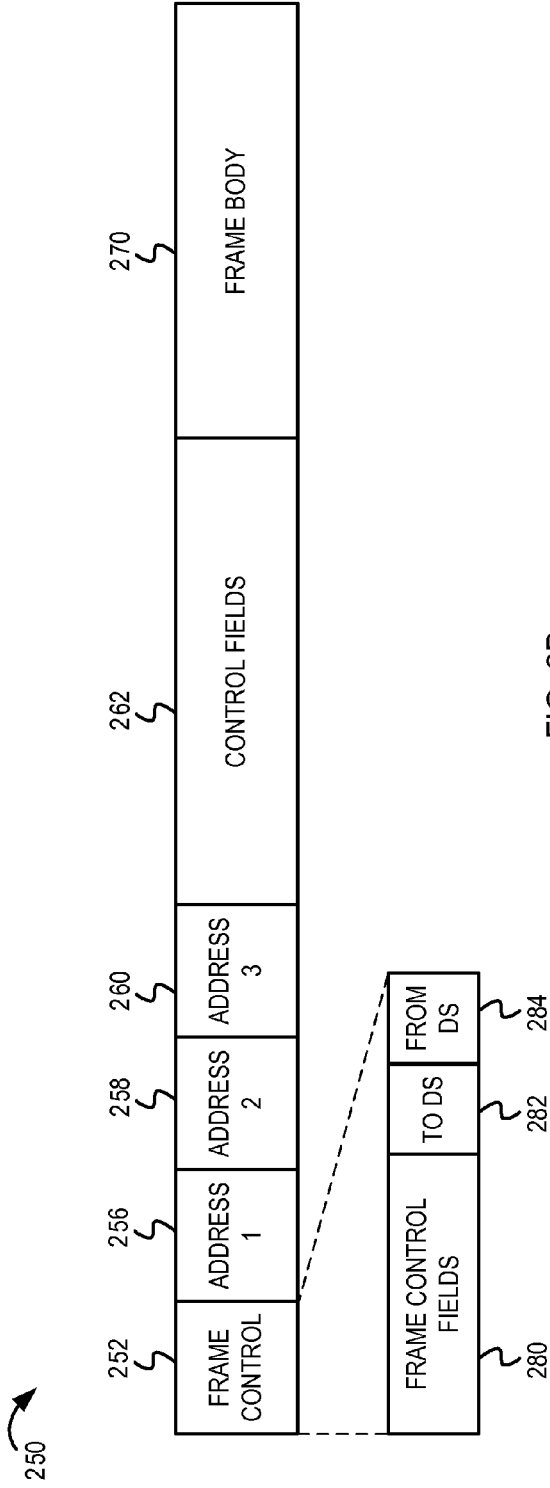


FIG. 2B

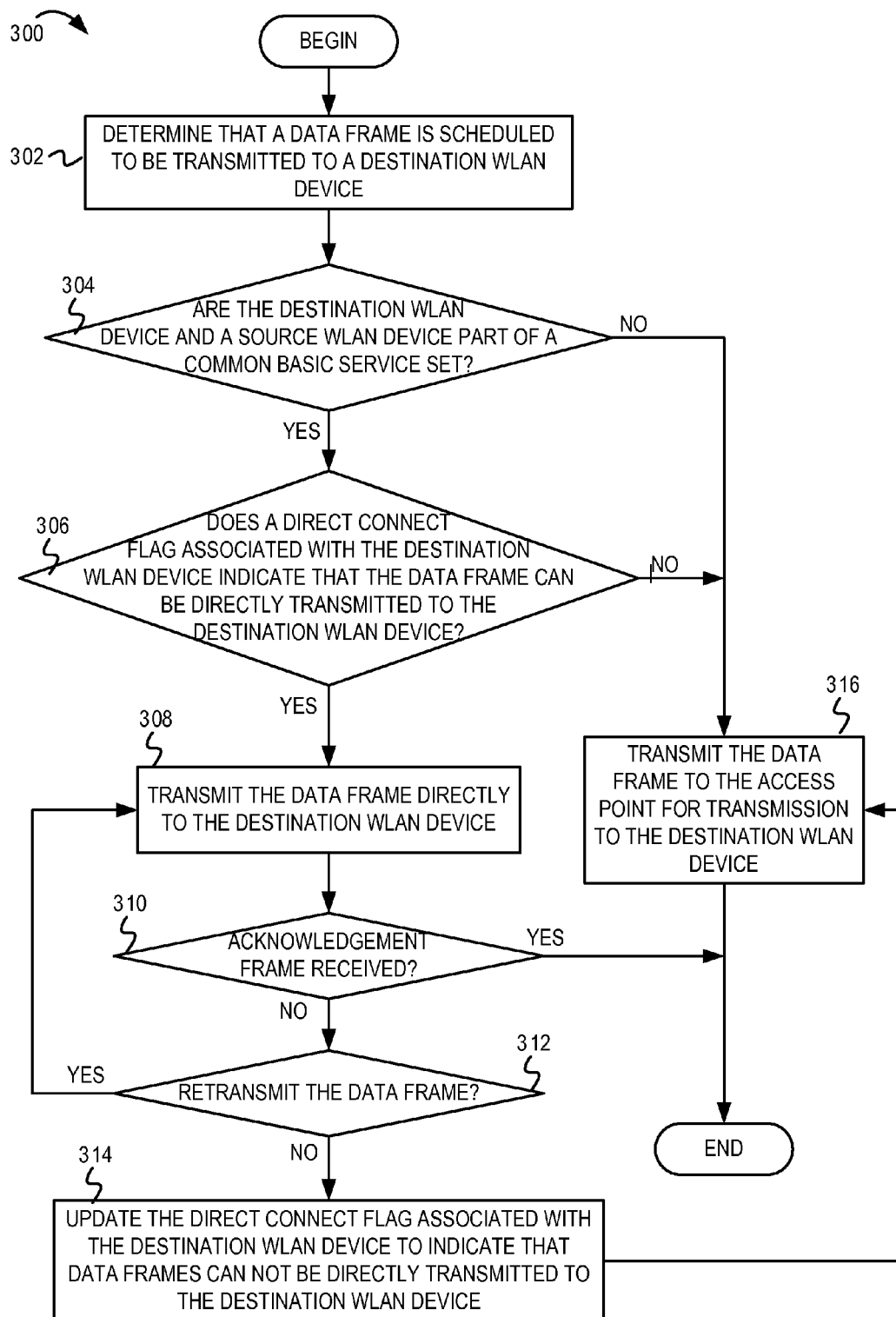


FIG. 3

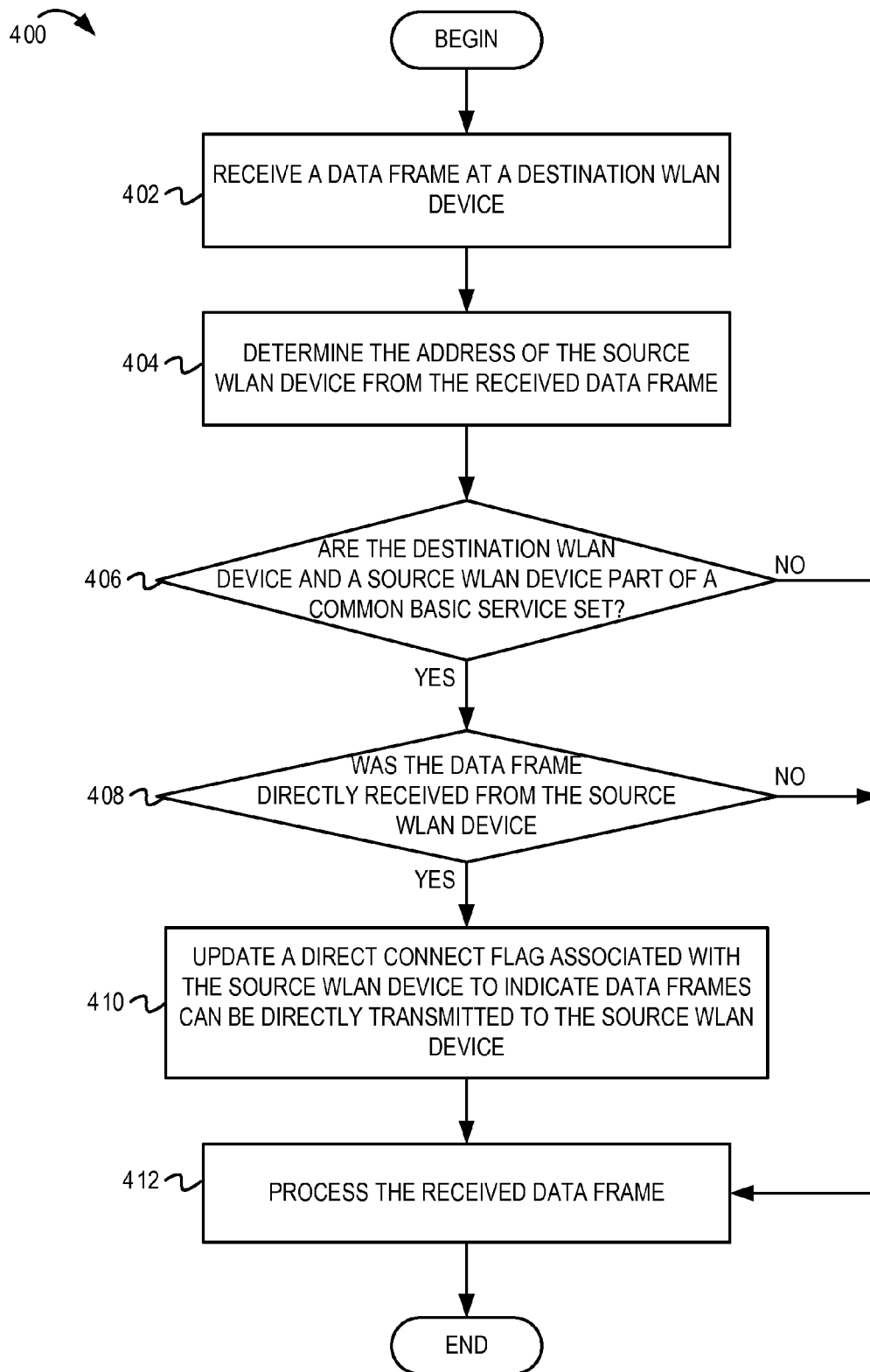


FIG. 4

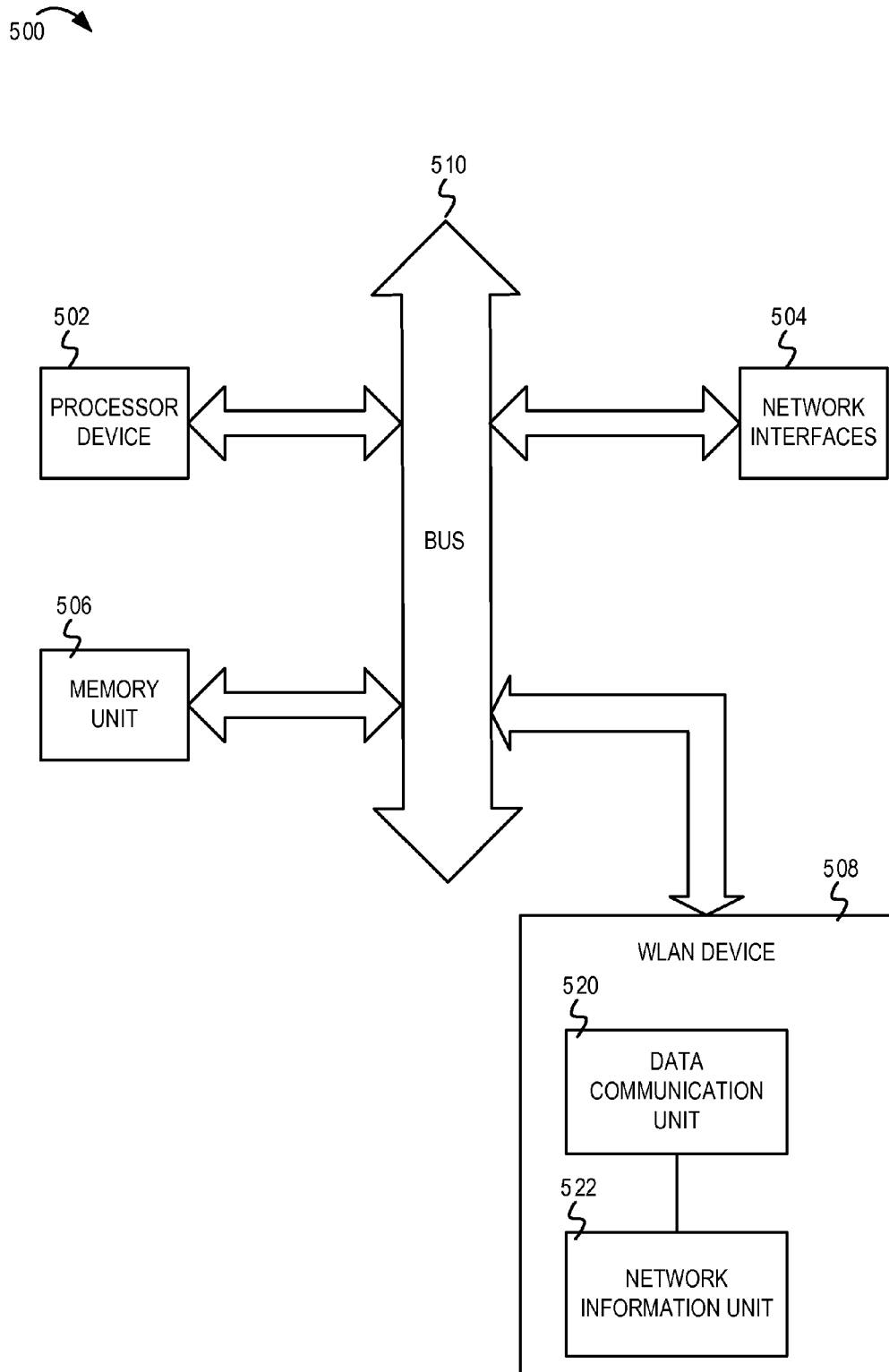


FIG. 5

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DIRECT DATA COMMUNICATION IN INFRASTRUCTURE MODE IN WIRELESS COMMUNICATION SYSTEMS

RELATED APPLICATIONS

This application is a Continuation of U.S. application Ser. No. 12/768,434 filed Apr. 27, 2010.

BACKGROUND

Embodiments of the inventive subject matter generally relate to the field of wireless communication and, more particularly, to direct data communication in an infrastructure mode in wireless communication systems.

An infrastructure mode in a wireless local area network (WLAN) ("infrastructure WLAN") provides a mechanism for WLAN devices to communicate with each other via a centralized connection point (i.e., an access point). For a source WLAN device to communicate with a destination WLAN device in the infrastructure WLAN, the source WLAN device first transmits data frames to the access point. The access point then transmits the received data frames to the destination WLAN device.

SUMMARY

Various embodiments for implementing direct data communication in an infrastructure mode in wireless communication systems are disclosed. In one embodiment, it is determined at a first wireless network device of a wireless communication network operating in an infrastructure mode, that a data frame is scheduled to be transmitted from the first wireless network device to a second wireless device of the wireless communication network. Then, it is determined whether the data frame can be directly transmitted to the second wireless network device based on connection information received in a beacon frame from an access point of the wireless communication network. The connection information comprises an indication of whether data frames can be directly transmitted to the second wireless network device. The data frame is directly transmitted to the second wireless network device, in response to determining that the data frame can be directly transmitted from the first wireless network device to the second wireless network device. The data frame is transmitted to the access point for transmission to the second wireless network device via the access point, in response to determining that the data frame cannot be directly transmitted from the first wireless network device to the second wireless network device.

BRIEF DESCRIPTION OF THE DRAWINGS

The present embodiments may be better understood, and numerous objects, features, and advantages made apparent to those skilled in the art by referencing the accompanying drawings.

FIG. 1 is a conceptual diagram illustrating example operations for direct data transmission in an infrastructure wireless system;

FIG. 2A illustrates an example format of a connected devices field for communicating connection information associated with the WLAN devices in the BSS;

FIG. 2B illustrates an example format of a data frame that is transmitted to the destination WLAN device;

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FIG. 3 is a flow diagram illustrating example operations at a source WLAN device for determining whether data frames can be directly transmitted to a destination WLAN device;

FIG. 4 is a flow diagram illustrating example operations at a destination WLAN device for updating information indicating whether data frames can be directly transmitted to a source WLAN device; and

FIG. 5 is a block diagram of one embodiment of an electronic device including a mechanism for direct data communication in an infrastructure WLAN.

DESCRIPTION OF EMBODIMENT(S)

The description that follows includes exemplary systems, methods, techniques, instruction sequences, and computer program products that embody techniques of the present inventive subject matter. However, it is understood that the described embodiments may be practiced without these specific details. For instance, although examples refer to direct data communication between WLAN devices, techniques for direct data communication as described herein may be implemented for other wireless standards and devices, e.g., WiMAX, ZigBee®, Wireless USB devices, etc. In other instances, well-known instruction instances, protocols, structures, and techniques have not been shown in detail in order not to obfuscate the description.

Typical operations for data communication in an infrastructure WLAN involve a source WLAN device transmitting a data frame to a destination WLAN device via an access point. The source WLAN device transmits the data frame to the access point, which, in turn, transmits the data frame to the destination WLAN device. In other words, communication between the source WLAN device and the destination WLAN device involves at least two transmissions of the same data frame. This results in an increase in transmission overhead and consequently results in transmission inefficiency.

Functionality can be implemented so that the WLAN devices in the infrastructure WLAN can directly exchange data frames, without first transmitting the data frames to the access point. The access point in the infrastructure WLAN can be configured to transmit a beacon frame to notify each WLAN device of the other WLAN devices in the infrastructure WLAN. The access point can broadcast device identifiers of the WLAN devices in the infrastructure WLAN and an indication of whether the WLAN devices can directly receive the data frames (i.e., without transmission via the access point). Based on this information obtained from the access point, a source WLAN device can determine whether a destination WLAN device can directly receive data frames. If so, the source WLAN device can directly transmit the data frames to the destination WLAN device without having to transmit the data frames to the access point. Such a direct data communication between WLAN devices in the infrastructure WLAN can reduce transmission overhead and can also improve transmission efficiency.

FIG. 1 is a conceptual diagram illustrating example operations for direct data transmission in an infrastructure WLAN. FIG. 1 depicts an access point 102, a WLAN device 104, and a WLAN device 110. The WLAN device 104 wirelessly connects to communicate with the access point 102 as depicted by a dashed line 150 between the WLAN device 104 and the access point 102. The WLAN device 110 also wirelessly connects to communicate with the access point 102 as depicted by a dashed line 152 between the WLAN device 110 and the access point 102. The access point 102, the WLAN device 104, and the WLAN device 110 together are part of a basic service set (BSS) 100 in the infrastructure WLAN. In an

infrastructure mode, the BSS constitutes an access point and WLAN devices associated with (i.e., connected to) the access point. The WLAN devices in one BSS can communicate with each other via the access point. The WLAN devices in one BSS can also communicate with WLAN devices in another BSS via their respective access points. As illustrated, in one example, the WLAN device **104** comprises a data communication unit **106** and a network information unit **108**. The WLAN device **110** comprises a data communication unit **112** and a network information unit **114**.

In some embodiments, the access point **102** transmits a beacon frame, at each beacon interval, to update connection information of the WLAN devices **104** and **110** in the BSS **100**. The access point **102** indicates a device identifier (e.g., a MAC address) of each WLAN device in the BSS **100**, and also indicates whether each WLAN device can directly receive data frames from another WLAN device. FIG. 2A illustrates an example format of a connected devices field **200** in a beacon frame used for broadcasting the connection information associated with the WLAN devices **104** and **110** in the BSS **100**. As depicted in FIG. 2A, in one example, the connected devices field **200** comprises a WLAN device address field **202**, a direct connect flag **204**, and reserved fields **206**. The WLAN device address field **202** can indicate a medium access control (MAC) address of the WLAN device or other suitable network/device identifier that uniquely identifies the WLAN device. The direct connect flag **204** indicates whether or not the WLAN device can be reached directly by another WLAN device in the BSS **100**. In one example, a value of "1" transmitted in the direct connect flag (i.e., direct connect flag=1) can indicate that the WLAN device can be reached directly by another WLAN device in the BSS **100**. A value of "0" transmitted in the direct connect flag (i.e., direct connect flag=0) can indicate that the WLAN device cannot be reached directly by another WLAN device in the BSS **100**. In some implementations, the access point **102** may transmit a default value of "1" in the direct connect flag **204** to indicate that all the WLAN devices in the BSS **100** can directly receive data frames. In other implementations, each WLAN device in the BSS **100** may indicate, to the access point **102**, whether it can directly receive the data frames from other WLAN devices. It is noted, however, that in other implementations, the connected devices field **200** may not comprise the direct connect flag **204**. In these embodiments, the WLAN devices may initially store a default direct connect value of "1" to indicate the other WLAN devices can directly receive data frames, and then update the direct connect value accordingly based on whether attempts to directly communicate with the WLAN devices are successful.

The access point **102** can transmit the connection information associated with the WLAN devices **104** and **110** connected to the access point **102** in the beacon frame. The access point **102** may update the beacon frame (e.g., vary the length of the beacon frame, etc.) based on a number of WLAN devices connected to the access point **102**. In one implementation, existing reserved fields in the beacon frame (not shown) may be used to transmit the connection information associated with the WLAN devices in the BSS **100**. In another implementation, one or more connected devices fields **200** may be appended to legacy beacon frame formats to indicate the connection information associated with the WLAN devices **104** and **110**. In one implementation, one connected devices field **200** may be allocated for each WLAN device in the BSS **100**. For example, if the BSS **100** comprises two WLAN devices, two connected devices fields **200** may be appended to the legacy beacon frame. The first connected device field **200** may indicate the connection information

associated with the first WLAN device and the second connected device field **200** may indicate the connection information associated with the second WLAN device.

Each WLAN device in the BSS **100** can receive the beacon frame, read the connected devices field **200**, and can store the connection information associated with each of the other WLAN devices in the BSS **100**. For example, from the beacon frame, the WLAN device **104** may determine and store the connection information associated with the WLAN device **110**. It is noted, however, that in other examples, the BSS **100** may include other WLAN devices in addition to the WLAN devices **104** and **110**.

In one embodiment, at stage A, the data communication unit **106** in a source WLAN device **104** determines that a data frame is scheduled to be transmitted to a destination WLAN device **110**. The data communication unit **106** may access a transmit data buffer (not shown) to determine that the data frame is scheduled to be transmitted to the destination WLAN device **110**. The data communication unit **106** may also determine that the device identifier of the destination WLAN device **110** is 0x00.

At stage B, the data communication unit **106** determines that a direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device **110** is set to "1". The direct connect flag can indicate whether the WLAN device associated with the direct connect flag can be reached directly (i.e., whether data frames can be directly transmitted to the WLAN device). The data communication unit **106** may query the network information unit **108** to determine the status of the direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device **110**. For example, the data communication unit **106** may provide the device identifier (e.g., 0x00) of the destination WLAN device **110** to the network information unit **108**. The network information unit **108** can access a connection information table **109** (or other suitable data structure) and can identify an entry **110** corresponding to the device identifier of the destination WLAN device **110** in the connection information table. From the entry **110**, the network information unit **108** can determine, and accordingly notify the data communication unit **106**, that the direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device **110** is set to "1". The direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device **110** being set to "1" can indicate that the source WLAN device **104** can directly transmit the data frame to the destination WLAN device **110**.

It is also noted that in some implementations, prior to determining whether the direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device **110** is set to "1", the network information unit **108** can determine whether the destination WLAN device **110** and the source WLAN device **104** belong to the same BSS **100**. If so, the network information unit **108** may access the connection information table **109** and determine whether the direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device **110** is set to "1". Otherwise, the network information unit **108** may indicate to the data communication unit **106** that the data frame cannot be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device **110**.

At stage C, the data communication unit **106** directly transmits the data frame to the destination WLAN device **110**. FIG. 2B illustrates an example format of a data frame **250** that is transmitted to the destination WLAN device **110**. The data frame **250** comprises a frame control field **252**, a first address field **256**, a second address field **258**, a third address field **260**, control fields **262**, and, a frame body **270**. The frame control field **252** comprises frame control fields **280**, a "To" distribution system (DS) field **284**, and a "From" DS field **286**. The frame control fields **280** comprises various fields for indicat-

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ing a transmission protocol (e.g., an 802.11 protocol version), a type of frame being transmitted (e.g., 0000 can be transmitted to indicate a data frame), etc. The “To” DS field **284** and the “From” DS field **286**, respectively, indicate whether the data frame **250** is destined for the distribution system (i.e., the access point **102**) or transmitted from the distribution system. The address fields typically indicate the address (e.g., MAC address or other device identifier) of the source WLAN device **104**, the address of the destination WLAN device **110**, an identifier (e.g., a service set identifier or SSID) of the access point **102**, etc. In FIG. 1, the data communication unit **106** determines that the data frame can be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device **110**. Therefore, the data communication unit **106** can indicate the address of the destination device **110** (e.g., the device identifier 0x00) in the first address field **256**, the address of the source WLAN device **104** (e.g., the device identifier 0x01) in the second address field **258**, and the identifier of the access point **102** in the third address field **260**. The data communication unit **106** may also set the “To” DS field **284** and the “From” DS field **280** in the frame control field **252** to “0” to indicate that the source WLAN device **104** will directly transmit the data frame to the destination WLAN device **110**. The control fields **262** can comprise additional address fields, can indicate quality of service (QoS) information, can indicate communication medium access durations, etc. The frame body **270** can comprise the information scheduled to be transmitted to the destination WLAN device **110**. It is noted, however, that in other embodiments the data communication unit **106** can be configured to transmit any suitable values in the address fields **256**, **258**, and **260** and in the frame control field **252** to indicate that the data frame is being transmitted directly by the source WLAN device **104** to the destination WLAN device **110**. Moreover, it should be understood that the data frame format **250** depicted in FIG. 2B is an example. Depending on the type of data to be transmitted, some fields depicted in the data frame **250** may not be used, the data frame **250** may comprise additional fields, and/or the length of the data fields may vary.

At stage D, the data communication unit **112** in the destination WLAN device **110** receives the data frame from the source WLAN device **104** and determines that the source WLAN device **104** transmitted the data frame directly to the destination WLAN device **110**. The data communication unit **112** may read the address fields **256**, **258**, and **260** in the received data frame **250** and may determine whether the data frame was transmitted by the access point **102** or by another WLAN device in the BSS **100**. For example, the data communication unit **112** may determine that second address field **258** indicates the address of the source WLAN device **110** and that the third address field **260** indicates the identifier of the access point **102**. This can serve as an indication that the source WLAN device **104** directly transmitted the data frame to the destination WLAN device **110**. The data communication unit **112** may also determine that the received data frame **250** was directly transmitted by the source WLAN device **104** based on reading the “To” DS field **282** and the “From” DS field **284** in the frame control field **252**. For example, the data communication unit **112** may determine that the “To” DS field **282** and the “From” DS field **284** are set to “0”. This can serve as an indication that the access point **102** did not transmit the data frame to the WLAN device **110**.

At stage E, the network information unit **114** sets a direct connect flag associated with the source WLAN device **104** to “1”. On determining that the source WLAN device **104** directly transmitted the data frame, the data communication unit **112** can notify the network information unit **114** to

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update the direct connect flag associated with the source WLAN device **104**. Receiving the data frame directly from the source WLAN device **104** can serve as an indication that the source WLAN device **104** can also directly receive data frames from the destination WLAN device **110**. In one example, the data communication unit **112** can provide the device identifier associated with the source WLAN device **104** to the network information unit **114** and can direct the network information unit **114** to set the direct connect flag associated with the source WLAN device to “1”. The network information unit **114** can, in turn, access its connection information table **115** and set the direct connect flag associated with the source WLAN device to “1”.

It is noted, however, that in some circumstances the network information unit **108** may indicate, to the data communication unit **106**, that the data frame cannot be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device **110**. For example, the network information unit **108** may determine that the data frame cannot be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device **110** if the network information unit **108** cannot locate the device identifier associated with the destination WLAN device **110** in the connection information table **109**. As another example, the network information unit **108** may also determine that the data frame cannot be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device **110** if the network information unit **108** determines that the destination WLAN device **110** is not in the same BSS **100** as the source WLAN device **104** (i.e., if the destination WLAN device **110** and the source WLAN device **104** are not connected to the same access point **102**). As yet another example, the network information unit **108** may determine that the data frame cannot be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device **110** if it is determined that the direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device **110** is set to “0” (i.e., the destination WLAN device **110** is configured to only exchange data frames with other WLAN devices via the access point **102**). In such cases, the data communication unit **106** of the source WLAN device **104** can transmit the data frame to the access point **102**. In the data frame format **250** of FIG. 2B, the data communication unit **106** can set the “To” DS field **282** to “1”, the “From” DS field **284** to “0”, the first address field **256** to the identifier of the access point **102**, the second address field **258** to the address of the source WLAN device **104**, and the third address field **260** to the address of the destination WLAN device **110**. On receiving the data frame, the access point **102** can appropriately route the data frame to the destination WLAN device **110** (e.g., via other access points, via an Ethernet network, via other communication networks, etc.).

It also should be noted that although FIG. 1 depicts the network information unit **108** indicating a status of the direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device **110**, embodiments are not so limited. In some implementations, the network information unit **108** may also implement functionality to update the connection information associated with the connected WLAN devices in the BSS **100** based on analyzing the connected devices field **200** in received beacon frames. The network information unit **108** may also update the connection information associated with the WLAN devices in the BSS **100** based on notifications from the data communication unit **106** (as described in stage E). In some implementations, the network information unit **108** may also communicate with the access point **102** and request connection information updates.

FIG. 3 is a flow diagram (“flow”) **300** illustrating example operations at a source WLAN device for determining whether data frames can be directly transmitted to a destination WLAN device. The flow **300** begins at block **302**.

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At block 302, it is determined that a data frame is scheduled to be transmitted to a destination WLAN device. In the example of FIG. 1, the data communication unit 106 of the source WLAN device 104 can determine that the data frame is scheduled to be transmitted to the destination WLAN device 110. The data communication unit 106 may access a transmit data buffer and determine that the data frame is scheduled to be transmitted to the destination WLAN device 110. The data communication unit 106 may also determine a device identifier (e.g., a MAC address) of the destination WLAN device 110. The flow continues at block 304.

At block 304, it is determined whether the destination WLAN device and the source WLAN device are part of a common basic service set (BSS). For example, the data communication unit 106 may determine whether the destination WLAN device 110 and the source WLAN device 104 are part of the same BSS 100. In other words, based on knowledge that the source WLAN device 104 is connected to the access point 102, the data communication unit 106 may determine whether the destination WLAN device 110 is also connected to the access point 102. The data communication unit 106 may query the network information unit 108 to determine whether the destination WLAN device 110 is also connected to the access point 102. The network information unit 108 may access the connection information table 109 to determine whether the connection information table 109 comprises connection information about the destination WLAN device 110. It is noted that as part of a beacon frame, the access point 102 transmits connection information associated with all WLAN devices in the BSS 100. Therefore, absence of the connection information associated with the destination WLAN device 110 in the connection information table 109 can serve as an indication that the destination WLAN device 110 is not connected to the access point 102. If it is determined that the destination WLAN device and the source WLAN device are part of a common BSS, the flow continues at block 306. Otherwise, the flow continues at block 316.

At block 306, it is determined whether a direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device indicates that the data frame can be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device. For example, based on knowledge of the device identifier of the destination WLAN device 110, the network information unit 108 can determine whether the direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device 110 indicates that the data frame can be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device 110. In one implementation, the network information unit 108 can determine whether the direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device 110 is set to "1" by accessing the connection information table 109. If the direct connect flag is set to "1", this indicates that the data frame can be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device 110. Alternately, if the direct connect flag is set to "0", this indicates that the data frame should be transmitted to the destination WLAN device 110 via the access point 102. The network information unit 108 can transmit a notification to the data communication unit 106 indicating whether the data frame can be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device 110. If it is determined that the direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device indicates that the data frame can be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device, the flow continues at block 308. Otherwise, the flow continues at block 316.

At block 308, the data frame is transmitted directly to the destination WLAN device. For example, the data communication unit 106 transmits the data frame to the destination WLAN device 110. With reference to the data frame 250 of

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FIG. 2B, the data communication unit 106 can transmit the address of the destination WLAN device in the first address field 256, the address of the source WLAN device 104 in the second address field 258, and an access point identifier in the third address field 260 to indicate that the source WLAN device 104 directly transmitted the data frame to the destination WLAN device 110. The data communication unit 106 can also set the "To" DS field 282 and the "From" DS field 284 in the frame control field 252 to "0" to indicate that the source WLAN device 104 directly transmitted the data frame to the destination WLAN device 110. The flow continues at block 310.

At block 310, it is determined whether an acknowledgment frame was received from the destination WLAN device. For example, the data communication unit 106 determines whether the acknowledgement for the data frame was received from the destination WLAN device 110. The data communication unit 106 may wait for a predefined time interval to receive the acknowledgement frame from the destination WLAN device 110. If it is determined that the acknowledgement frame was not received from the destination WLAN device 110, the flow continues at block 312. Otherwise, if it is determined that the acknowledgement was received from the destination WLAN device 110, the transmission was successful and the flow ends.

At block 312, it is determined whether the data frame should be retransmitted. For example, the data communication unit 106 can determine whether the data frame should be retransmitted to the destination WLAN device 110. In determining whether the data frame should be retransmitted, the data communication unit 106 may determine if a predefined retransmission time interval has expired. Also, the data communication unit 106 may determine if a maximum number of allowable retransmission attempts has been reached. If either the predefined retransmission time interval has expired or the maximum number of retransmission attempts has been reached, the data communication unit 106 can determine not to retransmit the data frame to the destination WLAN device 110. If it is determined that the data frame should be retransmitted, the flow continues at block 308 where the data frame is retransmitted to the destination WLAN device. If it is determined that the data frame should not be retransmitted, the flow continues at block 314.

At block 314, if the direct transmission to the destination WLAN device 110 fails, the direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device is updated to indicate that data frames cannot be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device. For example, the network information unit 108 can update the direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device 110 to indicate that the data frames cannot be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device 110. The network information unit 108 can update the direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device 110 in response to receiving a notification from the data communication unit 106 that the direct transmission to the destination WLAN device 110 failed. In one example, the network information unit 108 can set the direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device 110 to "0" to indicate that data frames cannot be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device 110. However, the network information unit 108 can set the direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device 110 to other suitable predefined value to indicate that data frames cannot be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device 110. After determining that the data frame cannot be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device 110, the data communication unit 106 of the WLAN device 104 can transmit the pending

data frame and subsequent data frames intended for the destination WLAN device 110 via the access point 102. From block 314, the flow continues at block 316.

At block 316, the data frame is transmitted to the access point for transmission to the destination WLAN device. For example, the data communication unit 106 transmits the data frame to the access point 102. The flow 300 moves from block 304 to block 316 if the data communication unit 106 determines that the destination WLAN device 110 and the source WLAN device 104 are not part of the same BSS 100. The flow 300 also moves from block 306 to block 316 if the data communication unit 106 determines that the direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device 110 indicates that the data frame cannot be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device 110. Furthermore, the flow 300 moves from block 314 to block 316 if the data communication unit 106 determines that attempts to directly transmit the data frame to the destination WLAN device 110 have failed. The access point 102 can accordingly route the data frame (e.g., via other access points, via ad-hoc WLAN networks, via an Ethernet network, etc.) to the destination WLAN device 110. Alternately, the access point 102 may wait until the destination WLAN device 110 connects to the access point 102. From block 316, the flow ends.

FIG. 4 is a flow diagram 400 illustrating example operations at a destination WLAN device for updating information indicating whether data frames can be directly transmitted to a source WLAN device. The flow 400 begins at block 402.

At block 402, a data frame is received at a destination WLAN device. For example, the data communication unit 112 in the destination WLAN device 110 may receive the data frame. In some implementations, the data communication unit 112 may receive the data frame directly from the source WLAN device 104. In other implementations, the data communication unit 112 may receive the data frame from the access point 102. The flow continues at block 404.

At block 404, the address of the source WLAN device is determined from the received data frame. For example, the data communication unit 112 can determine the address of the source WLAN device 104 from the received data frame. In one implementation, the data communication unit 112 can read the second address field 258 in the received data frame 250 of FIG. 2B and determine the address of the source WLAN device 104. The flow continues at block 406.

At block 406, it is determined whether the destination WLAN device and the source WLAN device are part of a common BSS. For example, the network information unit 114 of the destination WLAN device 110 can determine whether the destination WLAN device 110 and the source WLAN device 104 are part of the same BSS 100. In other words, the network information unit 114 can determine whether both the destination WLAN device 110 and the source WLAN device 104 are connected to the access point 102. The network information unit 114 can access the connection information table 115 comprising a list of device identifiers of WLAN devices connected to the access point 102. The network information unit 114 can determine whether the address of the source WLAN device 104 is listed in the connection information table 115. If it is determined that the destination WLAN device and the source WLAN device are part of the same BSS, the flow continues at block 408. Otherwise, the flow continues at block 410, where the received data frame is processed.

At block 408, it is determined whether the data frame was directly received from the source WLAN device. For example, network information unit 114 can determine whether the data frame was directly received from the source WLAN device 104. The network information unit 114 can

read a "To" DS field 282 and a "From" DS field 284 in the frame control field 252 of the data frame 250 and can determine whether the data frame was directly received from the source WLAN device 104. For example, the network information unit 114 can determine that the data frame was directly received from the source WLAN device 104 if the values in the "To" DS field 282 and a "From" DS field 284 are "0". The network information unit 114 may also read the second address field 258 in the received data frame 250 and determine that the source WLAN device 104 directly transmitted the data frame to the destination WLAN device 110. If it is determined that the data frame was directly received from the source WLAN device, the flow continues at block 410. Otherwise, the flow continues at block 412.

At block 410, a direct connect flag associated with the source WLAN device is updated to indicate that data frames can be directly transmitted to the source WLAN device. For example, the network information unit 114 can update the direct connect flag associated with the source WLAN device 104 to indicate that the data frames can be directly transmitted to the source WLAN device 104. In one example, the network information unit 114 can set the direct connect flag associated with the source WLAN device 104 to "1" to indicate that the data frames can be directly transmitted to the source WLAN device 104. However, it is noted that the network information unit 114 can set the direct connect flag associated with the source WLAN device 104 to other suitable predefined values to indicate that data frames can be directly transmitted to the source WLAN device 104. The flow continues at block 412.

At block 412, the received data frame is processed. For example, the data communication unit 112 and/or various other processing components in the destination WLAN device 110 can process the received data frame. From block 412, the flow ends.

It should be understood that the depicted diagrams (FIGS. 1-4) are examples meant to aid in understanding embodiments and should not be used to limit embodiments or limit scope of the claims. Embodiments may perform additional operations, fewer operations, operations in a different order, operations in parallel, and some operations differently. For example, the operations for determining whether the source WLAN device 104 and the destination WLAN device 110 are part of the same BSS (block 304 in FIG. 3) may be performed in conjunction with the operations for determining whether the data frame can be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device (block 306). In other words, because the access point only transmits connection information for WLAN devices within the BSS 100, the direct connect flag can serve as an indication of whether the source and the destination WLAN devices are part of the same BSS 100 and also whether the data frame can be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device 110. For example, the source WLAN device 104 can read the direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device 110 and determine that the direct connect flag is set to "1". Accordingly, the source WLAN device 104 can confirm that the destination and the source WLAN devices are part of the same BSS and that the data frame can be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device 110.

In some implementations, if the destination WLAN device 110 determines that the source WLAN device 104 is no longer in the BSS (e.g., has been disconnected from the access point 102, has joined another BSS 100, etc.), the destination WLAN device 110 may remove the source WLAN device 104 from the connection information table 115, may set the direct connect flag associated with the source WLAN device 104 to "0", etc. In another embodiment, however, the desti-

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nation WLAN device **110** may not have the ability to detect whether a WLAN device has left or joined the BSS **100**. The access point **102** can update the connection information to reflect a new WLAN device in the BSS **100** and/or indicate that a WLAN device has left the BSS **100**. The access point **102** can transmit the updated connection information in a next beacon interval to all the WLAN devices in the BSS **100**. The WLAN devices, in turn, can update their respective connection information tables to add new WLAN devices, remove WLAN devices that have left the BSS, etc.

Lastly, although FIGS. 1-4 depict a 1-bit direct connect flag having two valid values—one that indicates ability to directly receive data frames and the other that indicates inability to directly receive data frames, embodiments are not so limited. In some implementations, the direct connect flag can comprise two or more bits and can be associated with more than two valid values. A first value of the direct connect flag (e.g., value 01) can indicate that the WLAN device can directly receive data frames from another WLAN device. A second value of the direct connect flag (e.g., value 00) can indicate that the WLAN device cannot directly receive data frames from another WLAN device (i.e., the data frames can be received via an access point). A third value of the direct connect flag (e.g., value 11) can indicate that a direct connect status of the WLAN device is unknown. For example, if the access point **102** does not know whether the WLAN device can directly receive data frames from another WLAN device, the access point **102** may transmit the third value of the direct connect flag as part the connection information associated with the WLAN device. If a source WLAN device **104** detects the third value of the direct connect flag associated with a destination WLAN device **110**, the source WLAN device **104** can attempt to directly communicate with the destination WLAN device **110**. If direct communication is successful, the source WLAN device **104** can update the connection information table to indicate that data frames can be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device **110**. If direct communication fails, the source WLAN device **104** can update the connection information table to indicate that data frames cannot be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device **110**. In some implementations, the source WLAN device **104** may also notify the access point **102** of whether or not data frames can be directly transmitted to the destination WLAN device **110**. The access point **102** can update its connection information and transmit the updated connection information at a next beacon interval.

Embodiments may take the form of an entirely hardware embodiment, an entirely software embodiment (including firmware, resident software, micro-code, etc.) or an embodiment combining software and hardware aspects that may all generally be referred to herein as a “circuit,” “module” or “system.” Furthermore, embodiments of the inventive subject matter may take the form of a computer program product embodied in any tangible medium of expression having computer usable program code embodied in the medium. The described embodiments may be provided as a computer program product, or software, that may include a machine-readable medium having stored thereon instructions, which may be used to program a computer system (or other electronic device(s)) to perform a process according to embodiments, whether presently described or not, since every conceivable variation is not enumerated herein. A machine-readable medium includes any mechanism for storing or transmitting information in a form (e.g., software, processing application) readable by a machine (e.g., a computer). A machine-readable medium may be a non-transitory machine-readable storage medium, or a transitory machine-readable signal

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medium. A machine-readable storage medium may include, for example, but is not limited to, magnetic storage medium (e.g., floppy diskette); optical storage medium (e.g., CD-ROM); magneto-optical storage medium; read only memory (ROM); random access memory (RAM); erasable programmable memory (e.g., EPROM and EEPROM); flash memory; or other types of tangible medium suitable for storing electronic instructions. A machine-readable signal medium may include a propagated data signal with computer readable program code embodied therein, for example, an electrical, optical, acoustical or other form of propagated signal (e.g., carrier waves, infrared signals, digital signals, etc.). Program code embodied on a machine-readable medium may be transmitted using any suitable medium, including, but not limited to, wireline, wireless, optical fiber cable, RF, or other communications medium.

Computer program code for carrying out operations of the embodiments may be written in any combination of one or more programming languages, including an object oriented programming language such as Java, Smalltalk, C++ or the like and conventional procedural programming languages, such as the “C” programming language or similar programming languages. The program code may execute entirely on a user’s computer, partly on the user’s computer, as a stand-alone software package, partly on the user’s computer and partly on a remote computer or entirely on the remote computer or server. In the latter scenario, the remote computer may be connected to the user’s computer through any type of network, including a local area network (LAN), a personal area network (PAN), or a wide area network (WAN), or the connection may be made to an external computer (for example, through the Internet using an Internet Service Provider).

FIG. 5 is a block diagram of one embodiment of an electronic device **500** including a mechanism for direct data communication in an infrastructure WLAN. In some implementations, the electronic device **500** may be one of a personal computer (PC), a laptop, a netbook, a mobile phone, a personal digital assistant (PDA), or other electronic systems comprising a WLAN device. The electronic device **500** includes a processor device **502** (possibly including multiple processors, multiple cores, multiple nodes, and/or implementing multi-threading, etc.). The electronic device **500** includes a memory unit **506**. The memory unit **506** may be system memory (e.g., one or more of cache, SRAM, DRAM, zero capacitor RAM, Twin Transistor RAM, eDRAM, EDO RAM, DDR RAM, EEPROM, NRAM, RRAM, SONOS, PRAM, etc.) or any one or more of the above already described possible realizations of machine-readable media. The electronic device **500** also includes a bus **510** (e.g., PCI, ISA, PCI-Express, HyperTransport®, InfiniBand®, NuBus, etc.), and network interfaces **504** that include at least one wireless network interface (e.g., a WLAN interface, a Bluetooth® interface, a WiMAX interface, a ZigBee® interface, a Wireless USB interface, etc.).

The electronic device **500** also includes a WLAN device **508**. The WLAN device **508** comprises a data communication unit **520** coupled to a network information unit **522**. The network information unit **522** implements functionality for determining whether data frames can be directly transmitted to a destination WLAN device based on determining a status of a direct connect flag associated with the destination WLAN device, as described above with reference to FIGS. 1-4. The data communication unit **520** can transmit the data frames directly to the destination WLAN device or via an access point based on indications from the network information unit **522**, as described above with reference to FIGS. 1-4. It should

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be noted that any one of the above-described functionalities might be partially (or entirely) implemented in hardware and/or on the processor device **502**. For example, the functionality may be implemented with an application specific integrated circuit, in logic implemented in the processor device **502**, in a co-processor on a peripheral device or card, etc. Further, realizations may include fewer or additional components not illustrated in FIG. **5** (e.g., additional network interfaces, peripheral devices, etc.). The processor device **502** and the network interfaces **504** are coupled to the bus **510**. Although illustrated as being coupled to the bus **510**, the memory unit **506** may be coupled to the processor device **502**.

While the embodiments are described with reference to various implementations and exploitations, it will be understood that these embodiments are illustrative and that the scope of the inventive subject matter is not limited to them. In general, techniques for direct data communication in an infrastructure WLAN as described herein may be implemented with facilities consistent with any hardware system or hardware systems. Many variations, modifications, additions, and improvements are possible.

Plural instances may be provided for components, operations, or structures described herein as a single instance. Finally, boundaries between various components, operations, and data stores are somewhat arbitrary, and particular operations are illustrated in the context of specific illustrative configurations. Other allocations of functionality are envisioned and may fall within the scope of the inventive subject matter. In general, structures and functionality presented as separate components in the exemplary configurations may be implemented as a combined structure or component. Similarly, structures and functionality presented as a single component may be implemented as separate components. These and other variations, modifications, additions, and improvements may fall within the scope of the inventive subject matter.

What is claimed is:

1. A method for operating a first device in a network, the method comprising:

determining that a first data frame can be directly transmitted from the first device to a second device based, at least in part, on connection information, wherein the first device and the second device are communicatively coupled to the network using an infrastructure mode, and

the connection information is included in a beacon frame received from an access point of the network during a beacon interval;

transmitting the first data frame directly from the first device to the second device in response to determining that the first data frame can be directly transmitted to the second device;

determining that an acknowledgement frame associated with transmission of the first data frame was not received from the second device; and

updating a first flag to indicate that the first data frame cannot be directly transmitted to the second device.

2. The method of claim **1**, wherein the connection information includes the first flag that indicates whether the first data frame can be directly transmitted to the second device.

3. The method of claim **1**, further comprising: retransmitting the first data frame to the second device based, at least in part, on determining that the acknowledgement frame was not received.

4. The method of claim **3**, wherein retransmitting the first data frame to the second device is further based on

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determining at least one member selected from a group consisting of an expiration of a retransmission time interval and a maximum number of attempted retransmissions.

5. The method of claim **1**, wherein determining that the first data frame can be directly transmitted to the second device comprises:

determining a device identifier associated with the second device; and

identifying the connection information based, at least in part, on the device identifier.

6. The method of claim **1**, further comprising:

receiving a second data frame from a third device;

determining that the first device and the third device are part of the network based, at least in part, on the connection information;

determining that the second data frame was directly received from the third device; and

updating a second flag to indicate that data frames can be directly transmitted from the third device to the first device.

7. The method of claim **1**, wherein

the network is a wireless local area network (WLAN), and the first device and the second device are wireless devices.

8. The method of claim **1**, wherein determining that the first data frame can be directly transmitted to the second device comprises:

determining that the first flag has a value indicating that data frames can be directly transmitted from the first device to the second device.

9. A first device comprising:

a processor;

a network interface; and

a memory coupled to the processor, the memory storing instructions which, when executed by the processor, cause the first device to, receive a beacon frame from an access point transmitted during a beacon interval, and

determine that a data frame can be directly transmitted from the first device to a second device, based, at least in part, on connection information included in the beacon frame, wherein

the first device and the second device are communicatively coupled together to a network using an infrastructure mode;

transmit the data frame directly from the first device to the second device in response to determining that the data frame can be directly transmitted to the second device; and

determine that an acknowledgement frame associated with transmission of the data frame was not received from the second device.

10. The first device of claim **9**, wherein the connection information includes a flag that indicates whether the data frame can be directly transmitted to the second device.

11. The first device of claim **9**, wherein the instructions, when executed by the processor, further cause the first device to update a flag to indicate that the data frame cannot be directly transmitted to the second device.

12. The first device of claim **9**, wherein the instructions, when executed by the processor, further cause the first device to retransmit the data frame to the second device based, at least in part, on determining that the acknowledgement frame was not received.

13. The first device of claim **12**, wherein the instructions, when executed by the processor, cause the first device to retransmit the data frame further based on determining at

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least one member selected from a group consisting of an expiration of a retransmission time interval and a maximum number of attempted retransmissions.

14. A non-transitory machine-readable storage medium having machine executable instructions stored therein, the machine executable instructions comprising instructions to:

determine, at a first device, that a first data frame can be directly transmitted from the first device to a second device based, at least in part, on connection information, wherein

the connection information is included in a beacon frame received from an access point transmitted during a beacon interval, and

the first device and the second device are communicatively coupled to a network using an infrastructure mode;

transmit the first data frame directly from the first device to the second device in response to determining that the first data frame can be directly transmitted to the second device;

determine that an acknowledgement frame associated with transmission of the first data frame was not received from the second device; and

update a flag to indicate that the first data frame cannot be directly transmitted to the second device.

15. The non-transitory machine-readable storage medium of claim 14, wherein the connection information included in the beacon frame includes a flag that indicates whether the first data frame can be directly transmitted to the second device.

16. The non-transitory machine-readable storage medium of claim 14, further comprising instructions to:

retransmit the first data frame to the second device based, at least in part, on determining that the acknowledgement frame was not received, wherein

retransmitting the first data frame is further based on determining at least one member selected from a group consisting of an expiration of a retransmission time interval and a maximum number of attempted retransmissions.

17. The non-transitory machine-readable storage medium of claim 14, further comprising instructions to:

receive a second data frame from a third device;

determine that the first device and the third device are part of the network based, at least in part, on the connection information;

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determine that the second data frame was directly received from the third device; and

update a flag to indicate that data frames can be directly transmitted from the third device to the first device.

18. A method for operating a first device in a network, the method comprising:

determining that a first data frame can be directly transmitted from the first device to a second device based, at least in part, on connection information, wherein

the first device and the second device are communicatively coupled to the network using an infrastructure mode, and

the connection information is included in a beacon frame received from an access point of the network during a beacon interval;

receiving a second data frame from a third device;

determining that the first device and the third device are part of the network that uses the infrastructure mode based, at least in part, on the connection information;

determining that the second data frame was directly received from the third device; and

updating a flag to indicate that data frames can be directly transmitted from the third device to the first device.

19. A non-transitory machine-readable storage medium having machine executable instructions stored therein, the machine executable instructions comprising instructions to:

determine, at a first device, that a first data frame can be directly transmitted from the first device to a second device based, at least in part, on connection information, wherein

the connection information is included in a beacon frame received from an access point transmitted during a beacon interval, and

the first device and the second device are communicatively coupled to a network using an infrastructure mode;

receive a second data frame from a third device;

determine that the first device and the third device are part of the network that uses the infrastructure mode based, at least in part, on the connection information;

determine that the second data frame was directly received from the third device; and

update a flag to indicate that data frames can be directly transmitted from the third device to the first device.

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